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# THE LORD OF MISRULE

BY ALFRED NOYES

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*"On Whitsun ales and May mornings the wild heads of the parish would choose a Lord of Misrule whom they would follow with their pipers to the church (though the minister were at prayer and preaching) dancing and swinging their may-boughs over their heads in the church like devils incarnate."*

*—From an old Puritan Writer.*

ALL on a fresh May morning, I took my love to church  
To see if Parson Primrose were safely on his perch.  
He scarce had won to *Thirdly*, or squire begun to snore,  
When, like a sunlit earthquake,  
A green and crimson earthquake,  
A frolic of madcap May-folk came whooping thro' the door:

Come up, come in with streamers;  
Come in, with boughs of may;  
Come up, and thump the sexton,  
And carry the clerk away!  
Now skip like rams, ye mountains,  
Ye little hills like sheep!  
Come up, and wake the people  
That parson puts to sleep.

They tickled their nut-brown tabors. Their garlands flew in showers;  
And lasses and lads came after them, with feet like dancing flowers.  
Their queen had torn her green gown, and bared a shoulder as white—  
O, white as the may that crowned her;

While all the minstrels round her  
Tilted back their crimson hats and sang for sheer delight:

Come up, come in with streamers;  
Come in, with boughs of may!  
Now, by the gold upon your toe,  
You walked the primrose way!  
Come up, with white and crimson;  
O, shake your bells and sing!  
Let the porch bend, the pillars bow  
Before our Lord, the Spring!

The dusty velvet hassocks were dabbled with fragrant dew.  
The font was white with hawthorn; it frothed in every pew.  
Three petals clung to the sexton's beard as he mopped and mowed  
at the clerk;

And "Take that sexton away!" they cried.

"Did Nebuchadnezzar eat may?" they cried;

"Nay, that was a prize from Betty!" they cried, "for kissing her  
in the dark!"

Come up, come in with streamers;

Come in, with boughs of may.

Who knows but old Methuselah

May hobble the greenwood way?

If Betty could kiss the sexton;

If Kitty could kiss the clerk,

Who knows how Parson Primrose

Might blossom in the dark?

The congregation spluttered. The squire grew purple and all;

And every little chorister bestrode his carven stall.

The parson flapped like a magpie, but none could hear his prayers;

For Tom Tool flourished his tabor,

Flourished his nut-brown tabor,

Bashed the head of the sexton, and stormed the pulpit stairs.

High in the old oak pulpit,

This Captain of Misrule

(I think it was Will Sumner

That once was Shakespeare's fool)

Held up his hand for silence,

And all the church grew still.

"And are you snoring yet," he said,

"Or have you slept your fill?

"Your God still walks in Eden between the ancient trees,

Where naked feet go wading thro' pools of primroses.

And this is the sign we bring you, before the darkness fall,

That Spring is risen, is risen again;

That Life is risen, is risen again;

That Love is risen, is risen again; and Love is Lord of all.

"At Paske began our morrice,

And ere Pentecost our may;

Because, albeit your words be true,

You know not what you say.

You chatter in church like jackdaws  
 Words that would shake the dead,  
 Were there one breath of life in you,  
 One drop of blood," he said.

*"He died and He went down to hell. You know not what you mean.  
 Our rafters were of green fir. Also our roofs were green.  
 But out of the mouth of a fool, a fool, before the darkness fall,  
 We say He has burst His prison again!*

*The Lord of Life is risen again!  
 The boughs put forth their tender buds, and Love is Lord of all."*

He bowed his head. He stood so still  
 They bowed their heads as well.  
 And softly from the organ-loft  
 The song began to swell:  
*Come up, with blood-red streamers,*  
 The reeds began the strain.  
 The VOX HUMANA pealed on high,  
*The Spring is risen again!*

The VOX ANGELICA replied: *The shadows flee away!  
 Our house-beams were of cedar! Come in, with boughs of may!  
 The diapason deepened it—Before the darkness fall:  
 We tell you He is risen again;*

*Our God hath burst His prison again!  
 Christ is risen, is risen again! And Love is Lord of all!*

ALFRED NOYES.